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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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MIDWAY ISLAND

Midway Island, that lonely cluster of sand bars and coral reefs in the northwestern part of the Hawaian group has frequently been in the war news.

Our story takes us back to a more peaceful period in the history of this small island. Just before the turn of the century, a cable was being laid across the Pacific. Midway Island was chosen as one land base. S.S. Dickenson was the engineer in charge. Busy as he was, he found time to pick up shells on the beaches. To this store was added some given to him by the ruling queen of Hawaii. Altogether he brought home about 900 shells,packed in two large boxes. In time these were handed on to his son, J.G. Dickenson, also an engineer, who moved them with his other effects as the locale of his jobs shifted. Finally his travels brought him to Toronto. He donated the shells to the Royal Ontario Museum. Among them are many kinds of cowries, those beautiful vitreous shells found in warm waters.

THE MUSEUM, A PLACE OF RELAXATION

More persons than ever before are visiting the Royal Ontario Museum. On a recent Sunday afternoon more than five thousand passed through the galleries in three hours. Some find among Nature's works exhibited here relaxation from the cares of the times. Others see in the long record of man's handiworks through the ages, a hope that culture will flourish again as it has so often after difficult days in the past.

MONSTERS OF THE ICE AGE

The remains of mastodons and mammoths are frequently found in Ontario, according to Dr. L.S. Russell of the Royal Ontario Museum, and are sometimes mistaken for those of dinosaurs, a very different kind of animal from a much more ancient period. These two types which lived during the Ice Age,20,000 years or more ago are superficially alike and resemble an elephant. They have,however, a different internal structure and a more hairy coat. The teeth, which are the parts usually preserved, give the clearest distinction. Those of the Mammoth are very similar to the teeth of the Indian elephant; they are massive objects composed of many plates of enamel and dentine. The Mastodon molar is a much more tooth-like structure, with distinct roots, and pairs of cusps. In addition, both Mammoth and Mastodon had tusks, similar to those of the elephant. These tusks correspond to the second upper front teeth of humans. A skeleton of a Mastodon from near Welland, exhibited in the Royal Ontario Museum, has only one tusk, the other having been lost by accident early in life.

PREHISTORIC "FLY-PAPER"

Once upon a time, in a prehistoric forest, a myriad of insects hummed and crawled about much as insects do today. Some of them got trapped in the gummy resin exuding from certain trees. They struggled and buzzed but the substance engulfed them. Time marched on. Today, on the shores of the Baltic and elsewhere, fossilized resin, known as amber,is found. Specimens of amber in the Royal Ontario Museum disclose the perfectly preserved remains of the insects which hummed in a prehistoric forest.

MORE MIGHT FROM MINERALS

In wartime, as in peace,there are many exhibits in the Royal Ontario Museum that serve to illustrate the news. For example, consider the very ordinary looking rock-specimens, dolomite and brucite which are on display. These rocks are found in eastern Canada in abundance. From them is derived magnesium,an old metal which is now upon the industrial stage. Magnesium has some distinct advantages. Since it is one-ninth lighter than aluminum and forms strange alloys with other metals, it can replace aluminum in airplanes. It is also used in incendiary bombs and its oxide forms a resistant lining for metallurgical furnaces.

Germany has been producing thousands of tons of magnesium. The United States and Canada are speeding up their production of it. Near Renfrew, Ontario and Wakefield, Quebec, new plants are being built to treat dolomite and brucite, of which the latter is threefold richer in metal. Fortunately for us the large quantities of electric power needed in the process are accessible. In the United States they are not only extracting magnesium from rocks, but also from sea water. From the sea shall spring forth bombs and planes to smite the enemy.

RUBBER SHORTAGE! WET FEET?

When our present supply of rubbers wears out, are we doomed to have cold, wet feet for the duration? It is comforting to remember that people managed to keep their feet dry long before rubbers were invented. An exhibit in the costume gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum shows how they did it. A thick sole of leather, cork or wood was tied to the shoe; these extra soles were called clogs or pattens and very often they were raised on spikes or a metal ring, and the wearer was lifted right off the ground out of the mud and wet.

In Italy during the 17th century the pattens became exaggerated in height and the more important a lady was, the farther she was from the pavement. In general, however, the height was modest and, on the whole, they were quite practical.